JUDGE

from Front

law, the county judge/executive is charged with executing ordinances and resolutions passed by the fiscal court, carrying out county contracts and enforcing state laws that fall under the office or subordinate county officers. The judge/executive also has primary responsibility for the day-to-day administration of county government. That includes preparing and reviewing the county administrative code, ensuring proper procedures for personnel, purchasing and fiscal management, and keeping the fiscal court informed about the operations of county departments, boards and commissions. The office must also ensure the county is represented on boards, commissions, special districts and multicounty programs requiring participation.

Financial duties are a central part of the position and carry significant responsibility. Each year, the county judge/executive prepares the proposed county budget and submits it to the fiscal court by May 1, along with estimates of expected revenues from federal, state and local sources. After the fiscal court reviews and amends the proposal, the budget proceeds through a state review process before final adoption.

Once approved, the judge/executive is responsible for administering the budget, presenting claims to the fiscal court before payment, and co-signing warrants with the county treasurer. The office must also keep the fiscal court informed about the county's financial condition and prepare quarterly financial reports for both the court and the public. In the final year of a term, the judge/executive must also ensure that no more than 65 percent of current budgeted funds are spent during the first half of the fiscal year.

The county judge/executive also holds a wide range of administrative and appointive powers, although many require fiscal court approval. The office may appoint, supervise, suspend and remove county personnel, subject to that approval unless otherwise provided by law. Similarly, the judge/executive generally appoints members to boards, commissions and administrative positions created by the fiscal court, again typically with approval.

The position also carries responsibilities involving special districts, including the ability to help create, combine or abolish districts, subject to fiscal court approval.

The Republican candidates for the primaries are the incumbent Judge Executive Larry Russell Bryant, former Judge Executive Gale Cowan, and Magistrate for District 4, Chris Reeder.

In addition, the judge/executive has duties tied to water districts, fire districts and other local entities, as well as responsibilities related to tax reporting, assessment appeals and election procedures.

Beyond administration, the office includes a variety of specific statutory duties. The judge/executive may perform marriage ceremonies, administer oaths of office and, in some cases, issue permits for places of entertainment and fireworks displays outside city limits. The office also has authority to inspect the county jail at reasonable times and plays a role in overseeing certain aspects of jail policy. Election-related duties include receiving petitions for local ballot questions and setting election dates as required by law. As presiding officer of the fiscal court, the judge/executive participates as a voting member, sets regular meeting schedules and may call special meetings when needed.

Equally important is understanding what the county judge/executive can do independently, without prior approval of the fiscal court. One clear example is the authority to appoint a deputy county judge/executive. State law allows this appointment without fiscal court approval, and the deputy may assume administrative responsibilities of the office, though not the judge/executive's role in fiscal court meetings.

The judge/executive also has the ability to submit a reorganization plan for county government that becomes effective unless the fiscal court disapproves it within 60 days, giving the office significant initiative in shaping county structure. Additionally, the judge/executive may call special meetings of the fiscal court at any time and carries independent authority in areas such as receiving tax reports, setting certain election processes and performing other duties assigned directly by statute.

The position also includes a role in resolving deadlocks. If the fiscal court is unable to agree on an appointment after a specified period, the county judge/executive may step in and make the appointment, ensuring continuity of county operations. This authority underscores the office's role as the central administrative figure in county government.

Compensation for the position reflects its scope of responsibility. According to the Kentucky County Officials Informational Bulletin, Adair County is classified in Group III, which includes counties with populations between 10,000 and 19,999. The annual salary for a county judge/executive in that group ranges from $103,280.41 at Step 1 to $111,225.06 at Step 4, depending on tenure. In addition, the office receives an annual expense allowance of $3,600 for administering the county road program, paid quarterly at $900, and no receipts are required for those funds.

Taken together, the duties and authority of the county judge/executive make it one of the most consequential offices in local government. While many actions require cooperation with the fiscal court, the office also retains significant independent powers, particularly in administration, budgeting and day-to-day operations. In Adair County, as across Kentucky, the role remains central to how county government functions and delivers services to its citizens.

In the primary on May 19, for the Republican Party are running the present Judge Executive, Larry Russell Bryant, Magistrate for District 4, Chris Reeder, and former Judge Executive Gale Cowan. Todd Davenport is the only candidate for the Democratic Party and will face the Republican primary winner on November 3.

Elected Officials, Pt. 2: The Magistrates

MIG – While Adair County residents may know their local magistrates by name and district, Kentucky law makes clear that the true authority of those elected officials lies not in individual action, but in their work together on the Adair County Fiscal Court. Together with the Judge Executive and the County Attorney.

Magistrates — also known in state law as justices of the peace — represent districts across the county and serve four-year terms. They must be at least 24 years old, have lived in Kentucky for at least two years prior to election, and reside in the district they represent. In counties like Adair, where the fiscal court is made up of the county judge/executive and magistrates, they form the legislative and administrative body that oversees county government.

Their compensation is regulated by state law and depends in part on how much time they devote to county business. At the moment, the compensation for magistrates in Adair County is set at $ 855 per month, plus a training stipend if they complete their required training hours. Salaries must be set at the beginning of a term and cannot be changed during that term, though cost-of-living adjustments may apply. The compensation in Adair County was not raised for many years now.

Despite the public visibility of the office, magistrates do not act as individual administrators. Their authority is exercised almost entirely when the fiscal court is in session. Outside of those meetings, they hold no independent executive power over county operations.

Instead, their influence comes through votes and decisions made as part of the fiscal court.

Under Kentucky law, the fiscal court is responsible for the overall operation of county government. That includes appropriating county funds, supervising financial affairs, and buying or selling county property. The court is also charged with maintaining county buildings, roads, and other infrastructure, and with ensuring that inmates are housed either locally or through agreements with other counties.

In practical terms, that means Adair County magistrates help determine how taxpayer dollars are spent, what projects move forward, and how county services are delivered.

The scope of those responsibilities is broad. Through the fiscal court, magistrates take part in decisions affecting public health services, ambulance service, parks and recreation, libraries, solid waste management, and water and sewage services. They also play a role in road construction and maintenance, zoning and planning, and economic development efforts aimed at attracting new business and supporting tourism.

The fiscal court also has significant authority over county finances. Magistrates review and approve the county budget, which is initially prepared by the county judge/executive. They may amend appropriations, authorize the use of unanticipated revenue, and transfer funds between accounts when necessary. The court appoints the county treasurer, who handles receipts, disbursements, and financial records, but that work is carried out under the direction and approval of the fiscal court.

Locally, those decisions shape everything from road projects and equipment purchases to support for local agencies and services.

Magistrates are also involved in planning and development decisions. Fiscal court approval is required before a county joins or forms a planning unit, and the court may allocate funding to planning commissions. The court may establish departments, set salaries for many county employees, and adopt policies that guide how county government operates.

At the same time, magistrates are subject to strict legal requirements and oversight. Fiscal court meetings must be open to the public under Kentucky's Open Meetings Law, with proper notice given and minutes recorded. Most records are also open for public inspection.

State law also places clear limits on their conduct. Magistrates are prohibited from having a personal interest in county contracts and from using confidential information for personal gain. They may face fines, jail time, or removal from office for violations of the law, including improper spending of county funds or failure to carry out their duties. Even repeated absences from fiscal court meetings can result in forfeiture of office.

While magistrates no longer have the judicial responsibilities once associated with the office, their role in county government remains significant. In Adair County, their work on the fiscal court places them at the center of decisions that affect infrastructure, services, and long-term planning.

Individually, their authority is limited. Collectively, however, magistrates help guide the direction of county government — making their role one of the most important in local public service.

Magisterial district races: In District 1, incumbent Tony Denton (R) faces a competitive primary against Donnie G. Curry (R), Joe Edward Kimbler (R), and Jared Stargel (R). District 2 features James Eaton (R), former magistrate Daryl Flatt (R), and Greg Willis (R). In District 3, Republicans Todd Smith, Brian Turner, and Veronica Arnold will compete in May, with James E. Bennett (D) already advancing to the November ballot to face the Republican nominee. The District 4 Republican primary includes Chris Janes, Carley Fudge, and Barry Petty. District 5 lists Chad Brown (R) as the sole candidate.

In District 6, incumbent Ronald Mark Humphress (R) faces former magistrate Greg Caldwell (R).

District 7 features a three-way Republican contest between Bryan Cheatham, Richard Phelps, and Stephen Foster.

Duck Derby Returns Saturday in Columbia

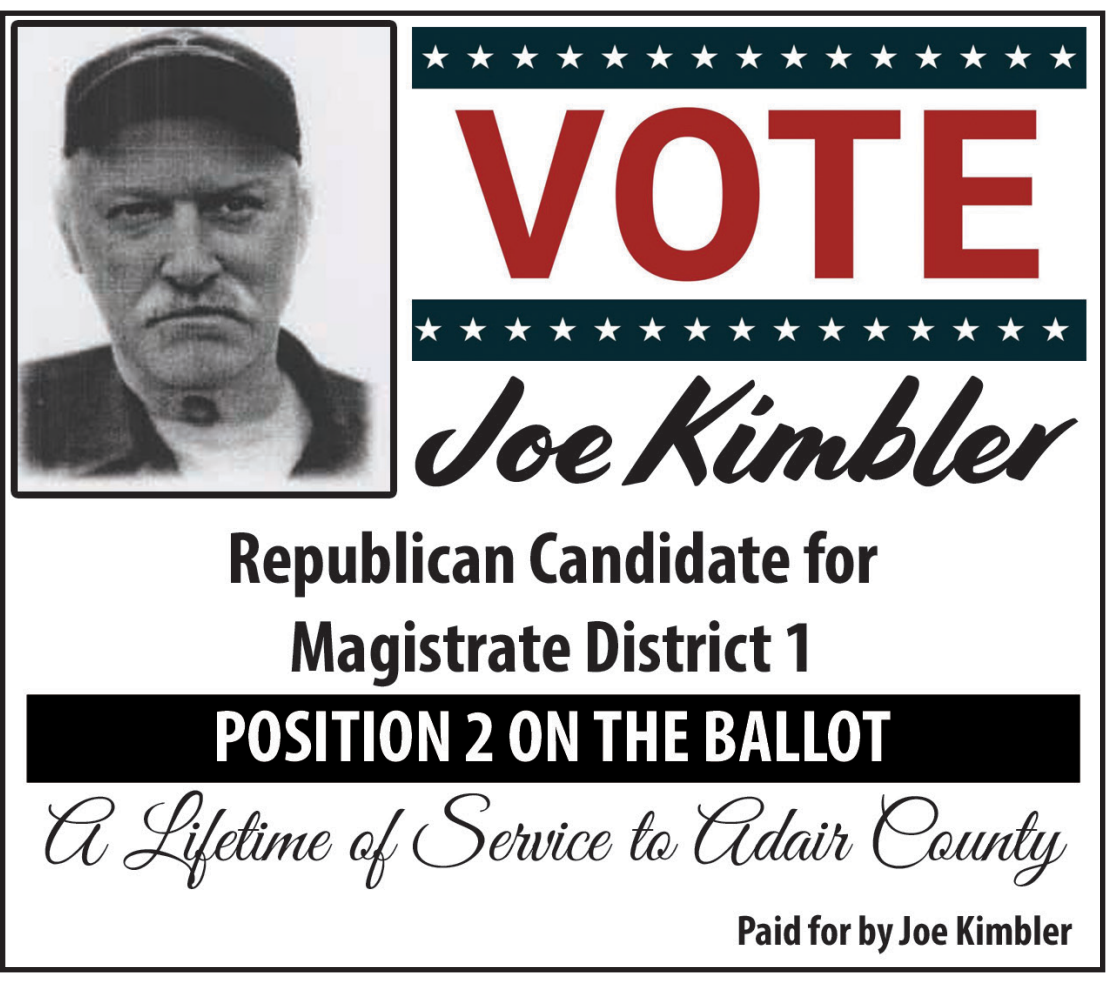
MIG – One of the community's more lighthearted traditions will return this weekend, as the 5th annual Columbia Duck Derby is set for Saturday, May 2, coinciding once again with Kentucky Derby festivities.

Known as the "Running of the Ducks," the event has grown steadily over the past several years and continues to draw support from across the community. Participants can purchase ducks for $5 each, with all proceeds going toward improvements to the Paddle Trail as part of Columbia's ongoing Trail Town efforts.

As in previous years, prizes will be awarded to those whose ducks place in the race. In addition, names of duck purchasers will be entered into drawings for a variety of donated prizes.

Organizers report that donations are already coming in for this year's event, including a kayak contributed by Walmart. Additional prize donations are still being accepted, and those interested in contributing are encouraged to contact City Hall.

The Columbia DeMolay Chapter will again assist with the event, continuing its involvement in community activities. "We appreciate everyone's response to this event for our community," said Pam Hoots, noting the continued enthusiasm and support shown by local residents.

One of the prizes of this weekend's Duck Derby will be this kayak, donated by Walmart, presented by Mayor Pamela Hoots and Police Chief Evan Burton. (Photo source: City of Columbia)

For more information, or to purchase ducks, individuals may contact City Hall and speak with Sydney Strange, (270) 384-2501. The derby will be getting underway at 11:00AM Saturday morning from the City's McKinney Landing trail town Kayak launch, it will also be streamed live on Facebook.